

**News Release
USDA Forest Service
USDI Bureau of Land Management**

Contact:

Rex Holloway, Forest Service, 503-808-2241

Brenda Lincoln, Bureau of Land Management, 503-808-6033

Agencies Amend the Northwest Forest Plan

PORTLAND, OR, March 23, 2004 - The Oregon and California State Offices of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Pacific Southwest and Pacific Northwest Regional Offices of the Forest Service today released two separate documents that amend the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan. The first is a Record of Decision that removes the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines from the Northwest Forest Plan. The second is a Record of Decision that clarifies provisions related to the Northwest Forest Plan's Aquatic Conservation Strategy.

Survey and Manage

The Record of Decision for the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines will result in continued species diversity and conservation while at the same time reducing costs and facilitating the agencies' ability to implement the forest management and timber production goals of the Northwest Forest Plan.

None of the species that were covered by the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure standards and guidelines are listed as Threatened or Endangered under the Endangered Species Act, nor are any proposed for listing. All of the Survey and Manage species were evaluated for inclusion in the agencies' Special Status Species Programs. For those that qualified, agencies must ensure that actions are consistent with the conservation needs of those species and that the actions do not cause the species to be listed under the Endangered Species Act.

There are approximately 8 million acres of late-successional and old growth forest that provide the habitats for the survey and manage species. More than 86 percent of this existing habitat is protected by the Northwest Forest Plan reserve components. During the next 50 years, under the assumptions of the plan for harvest, forest development, and fire, it has been estimated that there will be a net increase of 2.7 million acres of late-successional and old growth forest habitat for these species. Late-successional and old growth forest habitats are increasing at a rate 2.5 times the rate of loss through fire and harvest.

The provisions of the Northwest Forest Plan, combined with the agencies' Special Status Species Policies, will continue to provide for diversity of plant and animal communities and conserve rare and little known species that may be at risk of becoming listed under the Endangered Species Act. In addition, the decision will allow the Agencies to save \$16 million per year as well as improve their ability to meet the other resource goals, such as forest restoration, hazardous fuels treatment and timber harvest of the Northwest Forest Plan.

Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS)

The ACS is an integral part of the Northwest Forest Plan and was developed to restore and maintain the ecological health of watersheds and aquatic ecosystems on public lands. The Record of Decision for the ACS clarifies how the ACS is to be applied.

The ACS consists of a system of riparian reserves, a system of key watersheds, requirements and procedures for conducting watershed analysis, and a program of watershed restoration. The language clarifications do not change any of these components of the ACS.

The decision clarifies that the nine ACS objectives would be attained at the fifth-field watershed scale and not at the project or site level. A fifth-field watershed ranges from approximately 30 to 150 square miles (20,000 to

100,000 acres). All site level projects would continue to meet the protective measures in the standards and guidelines such as riparian buffer widths. The agencies would continue to seek attainment of ACS objectives at the watershed and landscape scales. The agencies will monitor watersheds to assure the Northwest Forest Plan is attaining the ACS objectives.

Northwest Forest Plan timber harvest and restoration projects have been delayed or stopped due to recent court interpretations of certain passages in the ACS. The ACS has been interpreted to mean that every project must achieve all ACS objectives at all spatial and temporal scales (site or project, watershed, province, region). This interpretation suggests land managers must demonstrate that a project will maintain existing conditions (or lead to improved conditions) at every spatial and temporal scale. Any project that may result in site-level disturbance to aquatic or riparian habitat, no matter how localized or short-term, could be precluded under this interpretation. By clarifying that ACS objectives are meant to be attained at the watershed scale, opportunities to integrate timber sales and restoration projects may increase.

Both Records of Decision were signed by Mark Rey, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment, USDA; and Rebecca Watson, Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management, USDI.

Copies of both Records of Decision can be found at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/nwfp.htm>.